

electoral administration bulletin

The
Electoral
Commission



Issue 283 (Scotland) – 15 March 2021

May 2021 election: guidance update

As the polls draw closer, we are continuing to hear from electoral administrators about the challenges they are facing in preparing for the verification and count processes in the current public health context. We wanted to review our guidance and support in this context, to see if there was anything further we could do to help Returning Officers and their teams to make decisions about how they will manage their verification and counts locally.

Working with the likes of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, Scottish Government, Solace, Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group (ERRWG) and AEA, we have tried to understand what further points we could helpfully include in our supplementary guidance - while recognising of course that we are required to advise in accordance with electoral law - and have expanded and clarified some aspects further, the key points of which are also summarised below.

Also, given the varying circumstances being faced across Scotland and the venues that will be available, we wanted to remind you that our Scotland team are available if you would find it helpful to discuss your own particular challenges – do please [get in touch](#) with the team if you'd like our support as you develop your own local arrangements.

Guidance

On attendance specifically, we've tried to respond to a number of queries about what the law enables in relation to the limitation of the number of counting agents who can be appointed to attend the count. As set out in [Part C of our core guidance](#), the law does allow for the limiting of the number of counting agents permitted to attend the verification and count where there are special circumstances, and whilst it is important to ensure candidates and agents are able to fulfil their scrutiny role, you should consider health and safety implications when setting the maximum number. It is our view that a decision to limit numbers using this provision where it is necessary in order to ensure adherence to coronavirus public health advice and to ensure the safety of all those involved is likely to be regarded as such a special circumstance.

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EA Bulletins are issued on a regular basis. They are one of our key channels for communicating with Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their staff. Past issues of Bulletins for England, Scotland and Wales are available [here](#). You can also [subscribe to the EA Bulletins](#).

Please [keep us informed](#) of any staff changes within your team. This will help us to keep our mailing lists up-to-date.

More generally, whilst public health considerations will mean that the verification and count will be managed differently than at previous elections, electoral law has not changed. This means that Returning Officers and their teams will need to make decisions about how best they can deliver the verification and count given their own specific circumstances whilst providing a safe environment for all those involved. If, despite your best efforts, you are unable to meet the legislative requirements in full, you should ensure that you keep a clear audit-trail of your decision making process.

Whatever decisions you make regarding the management of the verification and count based on your local circumstances, it is essential that you continue to treat all candidates, agents and political parties equally, and you should engage with them on your plans at an early stage. We have sought to make clear to campaigners in our recently published [supplementary guidance for candidates, parties and agents](#) that both the verification and count process itself and their attendance at the event will look and feel very different to previous events, to try to help manage expectations as to how the verification and counts will work in practice.

These points have now been reflected in our [supplementary verification and count guidance](#). We want to ensure that the guidance is as comprehensive and helpful as possible, so if you have any further thoughts on points you would like to see us address, please do let us know, and we will continue to keep it under review as we approach the polls.

May 2021 election: update on party names, descriptions and emblems

[Our guidance for Returning Officers](#) sets out what the legislation provides for in relation to changes to and deletions and additions of party names, descriptions and emblems.

For the May 2021 polls, we have advised on [our website](#) that registration applications received after Sunday 31 January 2021 may not be processed in time to take effect for the May 2021 elections. We have also made clear that applications that did not contain the required statutory information before that date are also unlikely to be processed in time.

While we aim to make all updates to the [online registers of political parties](#) by 25 March 2021, there remains the potential that the register could still be updated after that date.

As we have done previously, we will include regular updates of changes made to existing party names, descriptions and emblems and any new party names up to the close of nominations in future Bulletins.

In any case, when receiving nominations, Returning Officers must check that the party name or any description given on a nomination form, as well as the requested emblem, [is registered with us](#) and that the details provided match the registration. To ensure that you are viewing the most up-to-date information, you may need to delete your browser history or refresh the page. If you are unsure how to do this, your IT team should be able to advise you.

We are sending you this newsletter as it contains important information about the Electoral Commission's work which is relevant to you. The newsletter forms part of the Electoral Commission's public task which has its basis in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We will manage your personal information and contact details in line with the General Data Protection Regulation and UK data protection legislation as outlined in our privacy notice (<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/privacy-notice>)

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, you may [unsubscribe](#) at any time.

Should you have any questions about the registers, please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

May 2021 election: out-of-hours advice during the election period

We will once again be providing an out-of-hours telephone advice service to deal with urgent electoral administration queries in the run up to and immediately following the Scottish Parliament election, and we thought it would be helpful to remind you of how you can contact us.

Contacting us during normal office hours

We will be available between the hours of 08:30 and 17:30 throughout the election period to support you as usual.

If you are contacting us during normal office hours, please use our **Advice and Guidance Line: 0333 103 1928**.

Alternatively, you can email us at:
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Contacting us outside of normal working hours

Our out-of-hours advice service will be available from Monday 15 March and includes weekends and bank holidays throughout the election period. Evening cover will be from 17:30 until 22:00 and weekend and bank holiday cover from 10:00 until 16:00.

Additionally, there will be 24-hour cover available on polling day, and during the count from Friday onwards including weekend cover on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 May.

We can be contacted out-of-hours by calling: 07917 038 549

May 2021 elections: digital transparency campaign

We will shortly be launching a new online public awareness campaign ahead of the May elections which aims to encourage people to think more carefully about the political campaign advertising they see online. We want people to be confident about understanding digital political campaigning; understand who is targeting them and why; and know how to take action if they see something that concerns them.

The campaign will run from 15 March to 6 May on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and will target people who are typically more engaged in finding out about this issue. This is the first year of what we intend to be an ongoing campaign and we plan to broaden our audience demographic as we go on.

We are using a TV game show format, asking a question about whether a statement is fact or fiction. The ad shows the viewer the correct answer, and they can then click through to the [campaign page on our website](#) to get more information. There are five ads and they address a range of concerns people might have about online political advertising.

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